

## THE ART-UNION OF LONDON.

THE annual meeting of the subscribers to receive the committee's report, and distribute the amount subscribed for the purchase of works of art, was appointed for Tuesday week at Drury-lane Theatre, and all the elaborate arrangements consequent on the largeness of the body were made. On Monday week, however, the following letter was received at the office in Trafalgar-square:—

"Treasury, April 12, 1844.

"Sirs,—I am commanded by the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury to acquaint you that an institution called the Art-Union of London, having for its object the chance distribution of prizes of works of art, has been brought under the notice of their lordships, and that they are advised that it is illegal; and I am also to acquaint you that the further continuance of the same will render all parties engaged in it liable to prosecution.

"I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

"W. R. REYNOLDS.

"To G. Godwin and Lewis Pocock, Esqs.,  
4, Trafalgar-square, Charing-cross."

The committee immediately met, and a memorial was addressed to Sir Robert Peel, as First Lord of the Treasury, setting forth the nature of the association, the sum of money which through its means had been expended since its establishment in the promotion of the fine arts—the fact that the arrangements for the distribution were complete; and that if stopped at this moment great loss would be occasioned to many artists, and praying that assurance might be given that no legal proceedings would be commenced with the sanction of the government in the event of the general meeting being held as already arranged. The memorial was accompanied by a letter from the honorary secretaries, soliciting the serious attention of the right hon. baronet, and asking for an interview. Sir George Clerk, Bart., on the part of Sir Robert Peel, having appointed to receive the committee yesterday, Mr. George Godwin and Mr. Lewis Pocock, honorary secretaries, with Mr. Dickson, Mr. Gaskoin, Mr. W. Donaldson, Mr. Noble, Mr. A. Tooke, Mr. Troughton, Mr. Morant, Mr. Atkinson, Mr. Morris, Mr. Hayward, Mr. Collard, and other members of the committee, attended at Downing-street.

Sir George Clerk said Sir Robert Peel had placed the memorial in his hands, and that he should be happy to hear any observations which might be offered.

Mr. George Godwin, on the part of the committee, then made the following statement:—The Art-Union of London, since its establishment in 1837 (in consequence of the opinion published in a report of a committee of the House of Commons on arts and manufactures in 1837), has distributed about 36,000*l.* independently of the present year's receipts, in the purchase and preparation of works of art, and has put into operation painters, sculptors, engravers, metal-die sinkers, modellers, and artists in bronze (a branch of art up to this time much neglected in England), to say nothing of the branches of industry encouraged by it, as paper-makers, printers, frame and glass-makers, &c. As an instance of the magnitude of their operations in this latter respect, Mr. Godwin stated, that 300,000 sheets of paper had been used for the series of outline designs about to be distributed to the subscribers of the present year. The association had correspondents not merely throughout the United Kingdom, but in our Indian possessions, Nova Scotia, Hobart Town, Mexico, and New York. Mr. Godwin contended that to bind together a large number of individuals by a common interest—an interest in the arts of peace—was of itself an important result, tending to good. A reserved fund had been put by without interfering with the subscribers' rights, and promised to produce speedily permanent funds for the advancement of the higher branches of art. The society had now been in operation for eight years, increasing in usefulness, and the committee were confirmed in their views of its legality by numerous facts. Her Majesty the Queen was patron of more than one such association, and his Royal

Highness Prince Albert had very recently expressed to the committee of the Art-Union of London, through Mr. Eastlake, R.A.; his approbation of its objects. Among the vice-presidents of the Irish Art-Union were several of the judges; his Excellency Earl De Grey was a subscriber. The committee of the Edinburgh Society included numerous advocates, and, in addition to these points, the High Chancellor of Ireland, Sir E. Sugden, Mr. Fitzroy Kelly, Mr. C. Clarke, and others had stated their opinions that the Art-Unions, properly so called, were strictly legal. The committee now found themselves with 14,000*l.* in their hands—a large increase over the subscription of any former year, on the very eve of the distribution. All the elaborate arrangements consequent on the largeness of the body acted for had been made; artists had filled the exhibitions about to be opened with their works, and, in the majority of cases, looked to the funds of the association for a return for their skill and labour. The effect on these of suddenly preventing the application of the funds provided for their encouragement would be disastrous in the extreme, nor was it simply as concerned the funds of the Art-Union of London that the artists would be affected; he would speak within compass if he said that 40,000*l.* or 50,000*l.* were in the hands of committees throughout the kingdom to be applied in the way alluded to; the point then was, whether, without their entering into the question of legality, the committee might proceed with the distribution, and wind up the proceedings of the year. He would maintain that the Art-Union of London was not encouraged through the spirit of gambling; and would prove it, by shewing that with the exception of his Royal Highness the President, and men known to be patrons of art and above suspicion, the subscription was uniformly of one guinea, for which every man had his worth in the shape of engravings, the printed report, admission to the exhibition and other pleasurable and wholesome excitements. If they were prompted by a spirit of gaming, they would be found risking their five guineas or their ten guineas. The chance of obtaining a prize was too remote to be a leading motive. For the opinion entertained of the association by the artists, he would appeal to resolutions of confidence passed at a large meeting of artists, held at the Freemasons' Tavern last year, and to the fact that Sir Martin Archer Shee, the present respected President of the Royal Academy, had been a subscriber from the foundation of the society, and had been found at all times ready to give them his advice. The exhibition of prizes would, he was sure, seem to Sir George Clerk, who he was satisfied regarded the Fine Arts as important civilising agents, to be of great service. Last year, the exhibition was open four weeks, part of the time to the public without any limitation, and was visited by about 200,000 persons. The fear of the print-sellers that the Art-Union of London interfered with their trade, and which had led to the present steps on the part of the government, Mr. Godwin could not think well-founded. Prints had been distributed by the society in quarters where prints had never before been seen; the taste thus inculcated would make buyers; when one print was hung up another was speedily required. That the print-sellers themselves were favourable to the Art-Union was proved by the fact that they attended the committee of that association before transmitting the memorial, and stated that they had specially excepted it in their prayer. The question then was, are the efforts now making by the committees of Art-Unions throughout the kingdom to be stopped. If the government think that speculators avail themselves of the existence of Art-Unions to injure legitimate trade, will her Majesty's ministers bring in a short Bill to place them on a more assured and permanent footing? The immediate point, however, continued Mr. Godwin, is, can the committee of the London Art-Union complete their arrangements on Tuesday, as announced, or must the artists of the United Kingdom suffer the sudden deprivation of the means of remuneration which had been offered them, and for which they had been at work all the past year? The question was one of great importance, and he trusted they might receive such an assurance as should enable them satisfactorily to keep faith with

the public, and avoid the threatened injury to a large body of meritorious men.

Mr. Dickson, Mr. Hayward, and others, followed in confirmation of Mr. Godwin's statement.

Sir G. Clerk, who had received the deputation with great courtesy, said that the attention of the Commissioners of the Treasury having been directed to the subject, they had submitted a case to the Attorney and Solicitor General, and that in their opinion, the whole of the associations referred to were illegal, and that it was thought due to the committee to give them early intimation of the fact. Sir Robert Peel could not interfere in the matter; all he could do was to inform them of the law. He (Sir George Clerk) was himself a subscriber, and so were many others connected with the government; still, for the Treasury to give any sanction to further proceedings, although he fully admitted the difficulty of the position in which the committee found themselves, and the loss which would result to artists if the proceedings were stopped, was quite out of the question. If the opinions of the gentlemen were such as were stated, they could of course act on them if they pleased. The most prudent course, he thought, would be to postpone the meeting, giving the subscribers notice to that effect, and suspend proceedings until it could be ascertained whether or not the legislature would protect that and similar societies.

The deputation then withdrew.

The committee have determined to postpone the meeting for the present, and it remains to be seen what steps will be taken by the artists out of doors to strengthen the hands of the committee. Whatever may be the result, the rise and progress of this association will form a most extraordinary page in the history of the arts.

## RAILWAY BUSINESS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

MONDAY, APRIL 15.

*Newquay Harbour and Railway (re-committed) Bill.*—Reported; report to lie on the table, and to be printed, together with the report of 29th March.

*Manchester and Leeds and Heywood Branch Railway Bill.*—Read a third time, and passed.

*Furness Railway Bill.*—Queen's consent signified; read a third time, and passed.

TUESDAY, APRIL 16.

*Eastern Counties Railway Bill.*—Read a third time, and passed.

*Eastern Counties Railway (Brandon and Peterborough Extension) Bill.*—Report considered; motion made, and question proposed, "That the amendments made by the committee to the Bill be now read a second time;" debate arising, debate adjourned till Thursday.

*Leeds and Bradford Railway Bill.*—Reported; report to lie on the table, and to be printed.

*Yarmouth and Norwich Railway Bill.*—Report considered; motion made, and question proposed, "That the amendments made by the committee to the Bill be now read a second time;" debate arising, debate adjourned till Thursday.

*South-Eastern, Canterbury, Ramsgate, and Margate Railway Bill.*—Read a third time, and passed.

*Manchester and Birmingham Railway (Macclesfield and Poynton Branches) (No. 2) Bill.*—Queen's consent signified; read a third time, and passed.

*Manchester, Bury, and Rossendale Railway, and Manchester and Leeds Railway (Bury Branch) Bill.*—Ordered, that Mr. Cowper do make the report from the committee to whom the Manchester, Bury, and Rossendale Railway, and Manchester and Leeds Railway (Bury Branch) Bills were referred; and that such report be made to-morrow.

*North British Railway Bill.*—Report considered; motion made, and question proposed, "That the amendments made by the committee to the Bill be now read a second time;" debate arising, debate adjourned till Thursday.